

Teen Court

Teen Court is a program targeted at first-time offenders and designed as a type of deferred program for the children meeting certain eligibility requirements.

In order to be eligible for the program the teen must admit to a misdemeanor or lower charge. Many of the Teen Court participants will be referred from the Juvenile Probation Office. The court session meets out a constructive sentence before a real judge through a process utilizing teenage attorneys and jurors, giving a true definition of “jury of your peers.” Constructive sentences will include community service hours, jury terms, workshops, and essays. Each case brought before the jury will be different, as will the sentences. Once the sentence is complete, there is no evidence of the offense in the teen’s record, effectively giving the teenager a *second chance* to be a model citizen. The idea is to target those who, with some encouragement, have the best chance of staying out of future trouble.

Teen Court Participants

As with any program, success depends on the commitment of those involved. The participants in the Teen Court program are predominately teenagers. The program utilizes teenage attorneys, teenage bailiffs, teenage court clerks, and teenage jurors. With the aid of a few adults, teenagers develop leadership abilities, teamwork skills, and a sense of self worth. Listed below are the main players in the New Directions Teen Court.

The Defendants

The defendants are students in the community. After the teenagers are ticketed for their offenses, they first appear in front of the judge in a municipal, JP, or juvenile court. These will be first time offenses with a Class C misdemeanor or lower.

The Attorneys

The attorneys are primarily volunteers. These students are put through training before they are allowed into the courtroom in an attorney capacity. This includes the Defense and Prosecuting attorneys. They may call and question witnesses and bring forth information pertaining to their argument of the case.

The Jurors

Six jurors make up a Teen Court jury, and their verdicts must be unanimous before they can return from deliberations. The defendants participating in this program will be required to serve at least one term as a jury member. Members will be selected from area schools. Participants will be able to select from three different terms; fall, spring and summer.

The Clerk and the Bailiff

Both the court clerk and the bailiff are teenage volunteers. The court clerk swears in the jury and the witnesses, and calls each of the cases. After closing arguments, the clerk gives the sentence forms to the bailiff. After the jury returns from deliberation and the sentence is announced, the clerk records the disposition of the case on the docket.

The bailiff maintains order in the courtroom at all times. The bailiff also makes sure all participants are in their proper places, calls the court to order, and announces the judge. When the jury is ready to leave the courtroom to begin deliberations, the bailiff takes the sentence from the clerk and leads the jury to the jury room. Once a verdict is reached, the bailiff escorts the jury back into the courtroom, and after the verdict is read, the bailiff takes the verdict to the court clerk.

The Judge

The judge who serves in Teen Court will be a local judge or attorney. Should the judge be unable to serve the local Teen Court Coordinator will serve as judge. An adult is used in this capacity to continue the “real effect” of a courtroom appearance.

The Coordinator

Jacqueline Estephan is the Coordinator of Teen Court in Floyd County. The role of the coordinator is to recruit and organize Teen Court participants to act as prosecution and defense attorneys, bailiffs, and jurors. They assign and schedule defense and prosecution attorneys, and docket and supervise the preparation of their cases; attend hearings and assignments; verify teen jury service by juvenile offenders and report on compliance or non-compliance.